

VZCZCXRO2385  
OO RUEHPB  
DE RUEHWL #0815/01 2910458  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 180458Z OCT 06  
FM AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3386  
INFO RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA IMMEDIATE 4568  
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY IMMEDIATE 0602  
RUEHSV/AMEMBASSY SUVA IMMEDIATE 0519

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WELLINGTON 000815

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/FO AND EAP/ANP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/18/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NZ](#) [XV](#) [XU](#)

SUBJECT: NZ WORRIES FRICTIONS COULD DERAIL PACIFIC ISLAND  
FORUM

REF: STATE 171852

Classified By: DCM David J. Keegan,  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: New Zealand is working behind the scenes to help ensure that frictions over the Solomon Islands and other regional issues do not derail the October 23-26 Pacific Island Forum (PIF) meetings. PMs Clark and Howard are scheduled to discuss their goals for the meeting by telephone on October 18. NZ officials would like leaders to commit to streamline PIF architecture within the next few years without endorsing any specific proposals, and to agree on a format for future Pacific Forum Dialogue (PFD) meetings. On the Pacific Plan, NZ would like to see the PIF agree to examine the potential benefits of integrating regional transportation, information technology and communications. New Zealand officials intend to offer a new visa program for seasonal agricultural workers from the Pacific Islands, which should complement Australia's plan to finance regional training centers for skilled labor. End Summary.

-----  
Tensions in the Air  
-----

12. (C) On October 17, DCM and Pol-Econ Couns discussed New Zealand's goals for the PIF meetings with Deputy Foreign Secretary Alan Williams and Heather Riddell, Director of the

SIPDIS

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Pacific Division. Williams said the GNZ is concerned that regional tensions have the potential to make the PIF meetings complex and contentious. PM Clark will call PM Howard this Friday to discuss ways to prevent a dust-up as well as to discuss other goals for the meetings.

13. (C) Williams said conflicts between the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) and GOS, as well as Papua New Guinea's role in helping suspended GOS Attorney General Moti escape to the Solomons, are both potential flashpoints that GNZ fears could cause the Melanesian countries taking an "us vs. them" stance at the meetings. This could prevent the PIF from endorsing RAMSI's work and erode the Mission's ability to operate. NZ believes one possible solution is to have regular consultations between the Solomons, RAMSI, and the PIF, to "provide a circuit breaker on Solomons/RAMSI tensions. The Melanesian Spearhead Group went to Canberra recently to discuss this idea. Williams acknowledged that Australia might be anxious that the proposal would undermine RAMSI, but this possibility could be minimized through careful planning. Another possibility would be to put a PIF representative in Honiara.

Virtually every PIF country has a role in RAMSI, and more dialogue would put a helpful regional "fingerprint" on the Mission, said Williams.

14. (C) Riddell and Williams downplayed rumors that the PIF will vote to replace Forum Secretary General Greg Urwin as an anti-Australian gesture, although Melanesia may run another candidate to symbolically "stir the pot." There are no serious candidates out there, Riddell said. She also said she does not believe that recent anti-Government remarks by Fiji's military commander Bainimarama posed an immediate threat to the PIF or the GOF, although NZ is watching the situation closely. Bainimarama will be in the Middle East for the next three weeks, she added. (Yesterday, Foreign Minister Peters issued a statement strongly condemning the Commodore's remarks. This morning, PM Clark told a local radio news program that she took Bainimarama's threats seriously.)

-----  
NZ Agrees with US on Regional Institutional Reform  
-----

15. (C) Riddell said GNZ agrees with the USG view (reftel) that streamlining the PIF by consolidating existing organizations could have legal and financial implications for non-PIF members. For this reason NZ does not want the PIF to endorse any specific proposals at next week's meetings. But streamlining is an idea "long overdue," and GNZ therefore would like leaders to establish a task force and give it a fairly short time frame within which to make its report. Riddell said NZ hopes the work could be done in two to three years, but she acknowledged this was ambitious.

-----  
PIF Needs to Endorse PFD Restructuring and the Pacific Plan  
-----

WELLINGTON 00000815 002 OF 002

-----  
16. (C) Riddell said that the PIF Senior Officials' meeting she attended had made good progress in suggesting ways to maximize PFD meetings, but it is now up to the leaders. New Zealand's goal is for leaders to support the findings of the PFD review, acknowledging there are some practical issues to work through. If the PIF and the PFD endorse the broad proposal, they could then work inter-sessionally on additional "tweaks," and implement the plan by next year's meeting. Riddell said GNZ does not believe that a new format will in itself maximize PIF/partner interaction, but it will be a good start.

17. (C) Noting the Pacific Plan's goal of regional integration, Riddell said GNZ will propose the PIF focus on the potential impact on PIF countries and the region of integrating three key sectors: information technology and communications, energy, and transportation. She said that it was impossible to focus on the 24 goals laid out in the Plan, which clearly cannot all be priorities.

-----  
Labor Mobility  
-----

18. (C) According to Williams and Riddell, NZ and Australia both plan to introduce new measures to respond to PIC leaders' interest in improving conditions for regional labor mobility. On the day of our meeting, NZ Government Ministers met to approve a plan to encourage NZ farmers and vintners to employ Pacific Islanders as short term agricultural workers. GNZ issues about 90,000 temporary visas annually for seasonal work, mostly to those already here on working holiday or tourist visas. Just under 6 percent are issued to Pacific Islanders. Under the new scheme, if accredited employers can demonstrate there are no Kiwis available to do the work, the Government will provide them with the names of eligible

Pacific Islanders. This presumably will be easier for the farmers than locating workers from around the country. According to Williams, Australia plans to offer funding for regional training centers, making it possible for more skilled Pacific Island workers to migrate to find work because they have the skills Australian and other foreign employers seek, not because of nationality preferences. Williams said that GNZ will implement its program with deliberation, to avoid potential problems. GNZ also wants to be careful to be seen as complementing Australia's approach, rather than as more open to PIC workers than Australia. Both proposals serve different needs, said Williams, so should complement rather than compete with each other.

McCormick